

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11  
LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 /071 W  
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R 151500Z AUG 78  
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3167  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 THE HAGUE 4528

BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT PGOV NL  
SUBJECT: THE LABOR PARTY AND DEN UYL

1. SUMMARY: THE LABOR PARTY HAS LARGELY RECOVERED FROM ITS UNEXPECTED EXCLUSION FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT. ITS PRIMARY GOAL IN THE APPROACHING FALL LEGISLATIVE SEASON WILL CONTINUE TO BE TO BRING DOWN THE VAN AGT CABINET AND FORCE NEW ELECTIONS. DEN UYL IS PRESENTLY UNCHALLENGED AS LEADER OF HIS PARTY BUT THIS COULD CHANGE, DEPENDING ON THE PARTY'S SUCCESS IN MEETING THAT GOAL. THERE ARE SOME PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN THE LABOR PARTY BUT DEN UYL IS LIKELY TO MOVE CAUTIOUSLY AS HE TRIES TO ASSESS HOW SUCH CHANGES MIGHT AFFECT THE PARTY'S ATTRACTIVENESS TO DUTCH VOTERS. HE REMAINS, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, FULLY IN CONTROL AND ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES IN DUTCH POLITICAL LIFE. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER SIX MONTHS OF THE VAN AGT GOVERNMENT AND WITH POLITICAL ACTIVITY ABOUT TO RESUME (THE SECOND CHAMBER RECONVENES THE END  
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OF THE MONTH), A CERTAIN SENSE OF UNEASE AND DISSATISFACTION IS STILL EVIDENT WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY. ITS EXCLUSION FROM THE GOVERNMENT WAS UNEXPECTED AND IT WAS UNPREPARED FOR ITS OPPOSITION ROLE. BECAUSE IT IS THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE SECOND CHAMBER, THERE STILL IS A FEELING THAT SOMEHOW IT WAS CHEATED OUT OF THE FRUITS OF ITS ELECTORAL VICTORY. SOME YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE PARTY IN THE SECOND CHAMBER HAVE FOUND THEIR EXPECTED ADVANCEMENTS BLOCKED BY

SENIOR PARTY MEMBERS WHO HAVE RETURNED TO THE CHAMBER FRONT BENCH FROM MINISTERIAL AND STATE SECRETARY POSITIONS. THEIR SENSE OF DISCONTENT IS HEIGHTENED BY AWARENESS THAT THE COALITION PARTIES DID WELL IN LAST SPRING'S MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS SURPRISED MOST OBSERVERS WITH ITS RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE OVER THE FIRST SIX MONTHS (SEE THE HAGUE 3756).

3. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE NO URGENT OR PUBLIC DEMANDS FOR CHANGES IN LABOR PARTY POLICY OR LEADERSHIP. SECOND CHAMBER MEMBER VAN THIJN WAS DESIGNATED EARLIER THIS YEAR TO HEAD A COMMITTEE TO REEXAMINE QUESTIONS OF PARTY ORGANIZATION AND DECISION MAKING, BUT NO IMMEDIATE RESULTS ARE EXPECTED FROM THAT REVIEW. PARTY MEMBERS TEND TO DOWNGRADE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPRING ELECTIONS, ARGUING THAT LOCAL ISSUES CLOUDED THE RESULTS; SOME MAINTAIN THAT, IN ANY CASE, VOTERS' VIEWS HAVE CHANGED SINCE THEN AND THE PARTY WOULD DO WELL IN ANY NEW NATIONAL ELECTION. IN SUM, THERE IS A SENSE WITHIN THE PARTY OF WAITING TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE SECOND CHAMBER DEBATES THIS FALL, PARTICULARLY THE IMPORTANT DEBATE ON THE ECONOMIC MEASURES THE GOVERNMENT WILL INTRODUCE.

4. DEN UYL AS PARTY LEADER. IN THIS SITUATION, DEN UYL'S POSITION IS OF SPECIAL INTEREST. ALTHOUGH HE WAS CRITICIZED BY SOME OF HIS PARTY COLLEAGUES FOR FAILING TO GET LABOR INTO THE GOVERNMENT, HE IS GIVEN CREDIT FOR HAVING LED THE PARTY IN A CONFIDENTIAL

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SUCCESSFUL ELECTION (LABOR PARTY SEATS IN THE SECOND CHAMBER INCREASED FROM 43 TO 53), AND HE STILL HAS A CERTAIN PRESTIGE WHICH HAS CARRIED OVER FROM HIS PRIME MINISTERSHIP.

5. DEN UYL'S FUTURE POSITION IN THE LABOR PARTY WILL, TO A LARGE EXTENT, DEPEND UPON HIS SUPPORT IN THE TRADE UNIONS. MUCH OF BOTH THE PARTY'S VOTING STRENGTH AND DEN UYL'S POLITICAL POWER HAVE BEEN BASED UPON SUPPORT FROM THE LARGEST TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION, FNV, HEADED BY WIM KOK. DURING THE FOUR YEARS DEN UYL SERVED AS PRIME MINISTER, KOK AND HE COOPERATED CLOSELY, USUALLY OUT OF THE PUBLIC VIEW, USING THE UNIONS AND THE MINISTRIES IN A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL FASHION. THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP MAY HAVE BEGUN TO FADE; FOR EXAMPLE, THE FNV HAS TAKEN A POSITION REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT ECONOMY MEASURES ALONG DIFFERENT LINES FROM DEN UYL. KOK HAS, HOWEVER, GIVEN NO INDICATION OF ANY LESSENING IN HIS SUPPORT FOR DEN UYL AND, WE BELIEVE, IS UNLIKELY TO DO SO -- PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF ANY REAL ALTERNATIVE FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW.

6. WHILE DEN UYL IS NOT PRESENTLY CHALLENGED AS THE LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY, THIS COULD CHANGE; MUCH WILL DEPEND ON WHAT HAPPENS IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. THE PARTY'S GOAL AT THIS TIME IS TO BRING

DOWN THE RIGHT-OF-CENTER COALITION LED BY VAN AGT AND FORCE NEW ELECTIONS. DEN UYL WILL BE JUDGED PRIMARILY BY HIS PARTY COLLEAGUES ON WHETHER THAT GOAL IS ATTAINED. (THE LABOR PARTY DOES NOT WANT TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT WITHOUT NATIONAL ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH THAT WOULD BE CONSTITUTIONALLY POSSIBLE.)

7. PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN THE LABOR PARTY?

IF THE PARTY IS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN A NATIONAL ELECTION AND IN ITS GENERAL EFFORTS TO INCREASE PUBLIC SUPPORT, DOES IT NEED NEW ISSUES OR NEW FACES? IT MIGHT EVENTUALLY SUCCEED IN BRINGING DOWN THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT BY OPPOSITION FOR OPPOSITION'S SAKE OR BY SPLITTING THE COALITION FACTIONS, BUT IF IT IS TO PROFIT FROM SUCH TACTICS IT MUST HAVE A PROGRAM OF ITS OWN WHICH WILL APPEAL TO VOTERS OUTSIDE THE NORMAL SOCIALIST STREAMS. HOW CAN THAT BE DONE?  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 THE HAGUE 4528

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8. WHEN OUT OF POWER AND OPPOSING A CENTRIST-RIGHTIST GOVERNMENT, THE NATURAL TENDENCY FOR THE LABOR PARTY WOULD SEEM TO BE A MOVE TO THE LEFT. INDEED, IT WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT NOW FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP TO CONTROL ITS

ALWAYS TROUBLESOME LEFT WING THAN WHEN THE PARTY LED THE GOVERNMENT; THEN AT LEAST IT COULD USUALLY FEND OFF RADICAL MOVES BY APPEALING TO THE NECESSITY TO PRESERVE LABOR IN POWER. LEFTIST PRESSURE CAN BE EXPECTED TO GROW, AND WILL INEVITABLY BE SEEN AS AN ATTACK ON DEN UYL'S LEADERSHIP.

9. AGAINST THAT TENDENCY, HOWEVER, IS THE VIEW, WHICH WE BELIEVE IT GENERALLY ACCEPTED WITHIN THE PARTY, THAT A POLICY MOVE TO THE LEFT AT THIS TIME WOULD NOT INCREASE LABOR'S ATTRACTIVENESS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THIS VIEW IS REINFORCED BY THE WIDE ACCEPTABILITY OF THE VAN AGT GOVERNMENT AND BY THE SPRING ELECTION RESULTS (ALTHOUGH THESE RESULTS ARE SUBJECT TO DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS, AS INDICATED ABOVE).

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10. DEN UYL'S TASK IN THE PERIOD AHEAD IS TO ASSESS THE DEMANDS (AND EXPECTATIONS) WITHIN HIS PARTY FOR CHANGES WHICH, IN THE VIEW OF THEIR PROPONENTS, WOULD INCREASE THE PARTY'S ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG THE ELECTORATE. AT THE SAME TIME HE MUST ESTIMATE THE EFFECT ON THE GENERAL PUBLIC OF ANY SUCH CHANGES. HIS STATUS AS PARTY LEADER COULD WELL DEPEND ON THE FIRST OF THESE ASSESSMENTS; HIS CHANCE TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER AGAIN COULD DEPEND ON THE SECOND.

11. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT DEN UYL HAS SURVIVED MANY UPS AND DOWNS IN HIS THIRTY PLUS YEARS ON THE DUTCH POLITICAL SCENE. THAT SURVIVAL RESULTS FROM A COMBINATION OF HIS INTELLIGENCE, HIS PERSEVERANCE AND, ABOVE ALL, HIS ABILITY TO JUDGE WHAT HIS PARTY AND THE COUNTRY IN GENERAL WILL ACCEPT IN THE NATURE OF POLITICAL MOVES AT ANY GIVEN TIME. HE IS MORE PRAGMATIC THAN INNOVATIVE AND MORE INCLINED TO ADJUST TO CONDITIONS AS HE PERCEIVES THEM THAN TO ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THEM. DOCTRINE IS NOT A STRAIT-JACKET FOR HIM, ALTHOUGH HE DOES HAVE A STUBBORN STREAK.

12. OUR HUNCH IS THAT DEN UYL WILL FOLLOW MORE THAN HE WILL LEAD IN THE MONTHS AHEAD, PRODDING THE GOVERNMENT FREQUENTLY IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL STUMBLE PERHAPS BADLY ENOUGH TO OFFER HIM ANOTHER CHANCE. AS MENTIONED ABOVE, HE WILL HAVE TO ASSESS THE CALL FOR CHANGES IN THE PERIOD AHEAD; HOWEVER, HE WILL MOST LIKELY NOT ATTEMPT TO SHAPE EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS, ONLY TO DETERMINE ACCURATELY WHAT THEY ARE. HE CERTAINLY WILL HAVE IN MIND THAT HE IS NOT PRIME MINISTER NOW BECAUSE HE FAILED TO KEEP IN CLOSE ENOUGH TOUCH WITH HIS OWN PARTY AND TO BE AWARE OF ITS DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS LAST AUTUMN. IT IS A LESSON HE COULD SCARCELY FORGET-OR BE ALLOWED TO FORGET.

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13. A CAREFUL AND KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVER, WHEN ASKED TO COMMENT ON DEN UYL'S FUTURE, RECENTLY TOLD US THAT TWO FACTORS MUST BE REMEMBERED IN CONTEMPLATING THAT FUTURE: FIRST, DEN UYL--IN SPITE OF HIS YEARS OF POLITICAL EXPERIENCE--OFTEN IS UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO COMPROMISE. IT WAS THIS INABILITY WHICH KEPT HIM FROM FORMING A GOVERNMENT LAST FALL BECAUSE HE CDA EVENTUALLY LOST PATIENCE WITH HIS CONTINUED NON-ACCEPTANCE OF COMPROMISE PROPOSALS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF CABINET PORTFOLIOS, POINTS FOR THE COALITION AGREEMENT, ETC. THE REQUIREMENT FOR COMPROMISE APPEARS TO BE A LESSON HE NEVER LEARNED, OUR SOURCE REMARKED. THE SECOND FACTOR IS THAT DEN UYL HAS NEVER GROOMED AN HEIR APPARENT. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS TO DEN UYL, BUT ALL ARE SOME DISTANCE BEHIND HIM IN EXPERIENCE AND STATURE AND NONE HAVE BEEN EVEN INFORMALLY INDICATED BY DEN UYL TO BE HIS SUCCESSOR AS PARTY LEADER. IT TAKES AT LEAST TWO YEARS IN THE NETHERLANDS FOR A NEW POLITICAL FIGURE TO BE GROOMED AND PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC AND IF DEN UYL BEINGS NEXT YEAR IN VARIOUS INFORMAL WAYS TO INDICATE HIS CHOICE OF AN HEIR, THIS MAY BE OUR FIRST INDICATION OF HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF HIS FUTURE.

14. CONCLUSION. DEN UYL HAS DEMONSTRATED A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF RESILIENCY IN REBOUNDING FROM A POLITICAL AND PERSONAL DEFEAT TO LEAD HIS PARTY EFFECTIVELY IN THE SECOND CHAMBER. HOWEVER, IF THE VAN AGT GOVERNMENT LASTS UNTIL THE NEXT REGULAR ELECTIONS IN THE SPRING OF 1981, DEN UYL WOULD COME UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE TO STEP DOWN AS LABOR PARTY LEADER. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE GOVERNMENT FALLS THIS AUTUMN OR NEXT YEAR, DEN UYL WOULD LIKELY BE JUDGED SUCCESSFUL AND BE HIS PARTY'S LEADER IN THE NEXT ELECTION CAMPAIGN. FOR THE PRESENT, HE REMAINS IN ALMOST UNDISPUTED CONTROL OF HIS PARTY AND THEREFORE CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES ON THE DUTCH SCENE.

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## Message Attributes

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